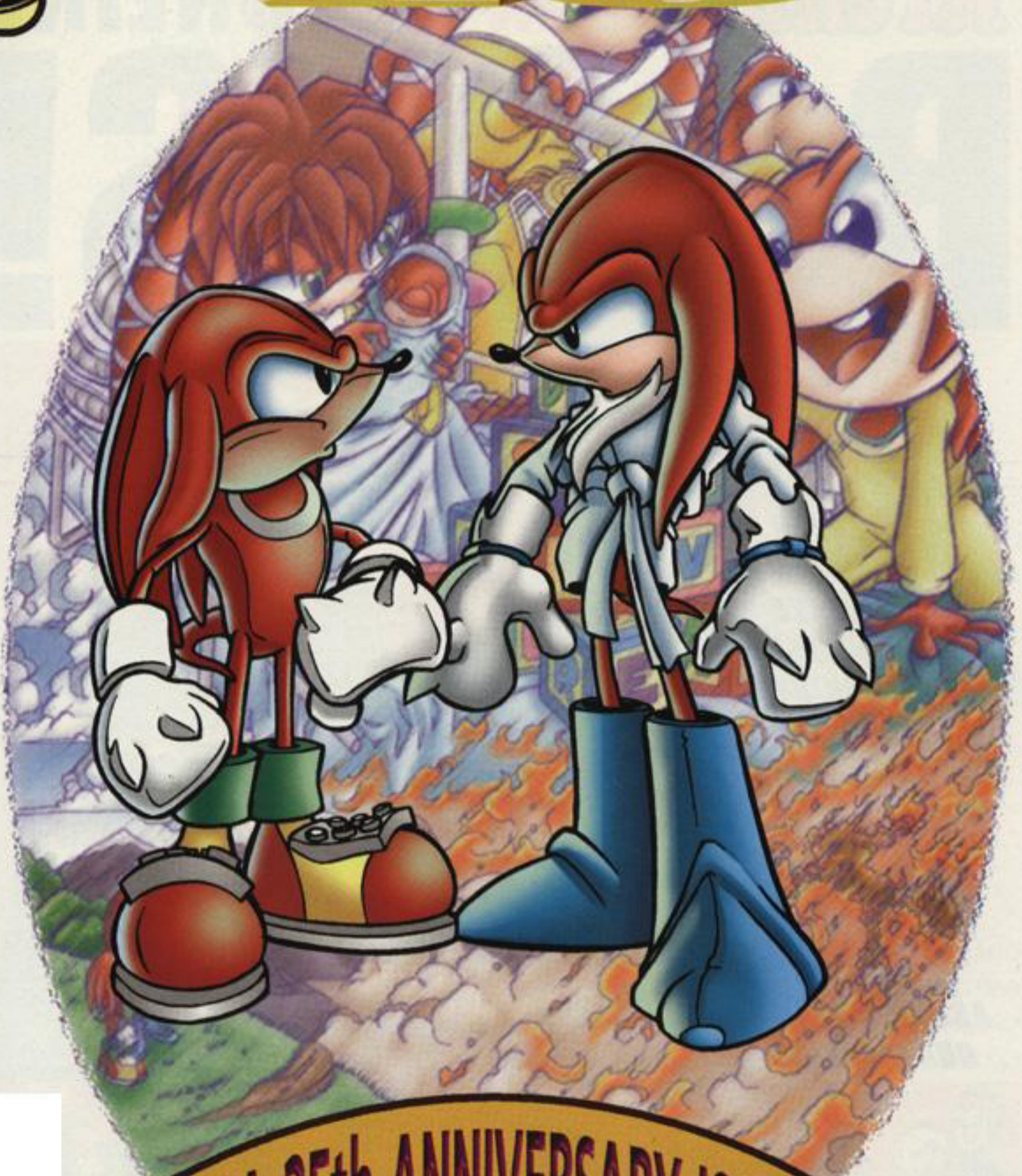


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KNUCKLES™



GALA 25th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

DIRECT EDITION

GNUCKLES

BOOK TWENTY-FIVE CHILDHOOD'S END

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BORN TO THE MOST NOBLE OF ECHIDNA HOUSES, THE LATEST TO CONTINUE THE FAMILY HERITAGE AND RESPONSIBILITY AS GUARDIAN OF THE FLOATING ISLAND, DEFENDER OF ALL AGAINST THE FORCES OF EVIL FROM THE WORLD BEYOND AS WELL AS THOSE WHO WOULD THREATEN FROM WITHIN!

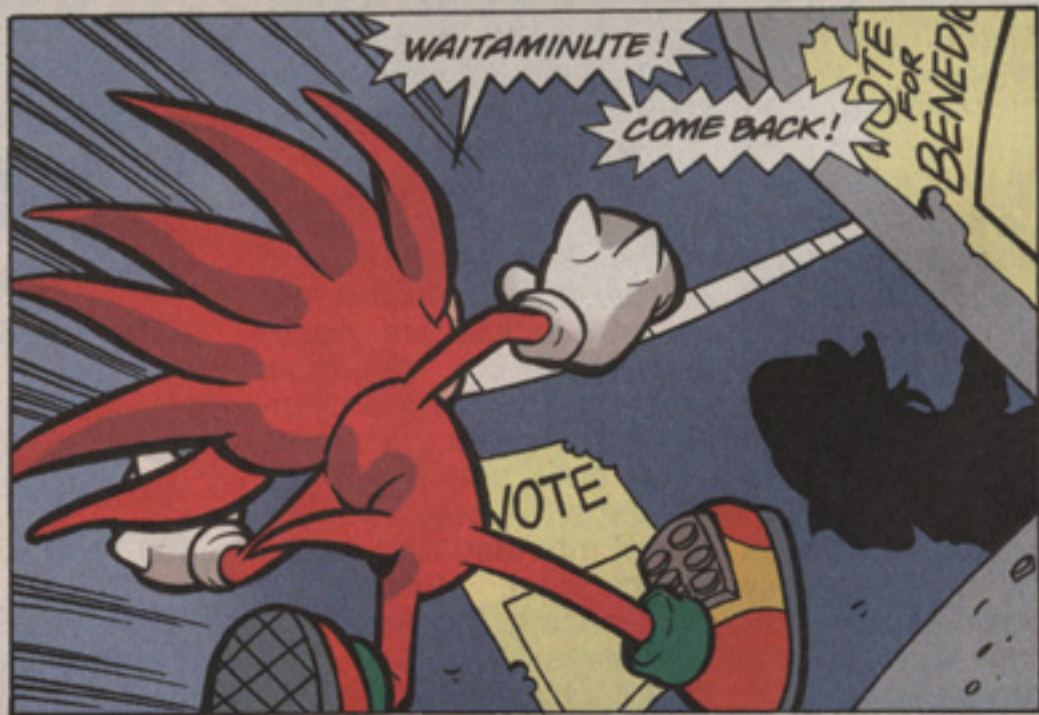
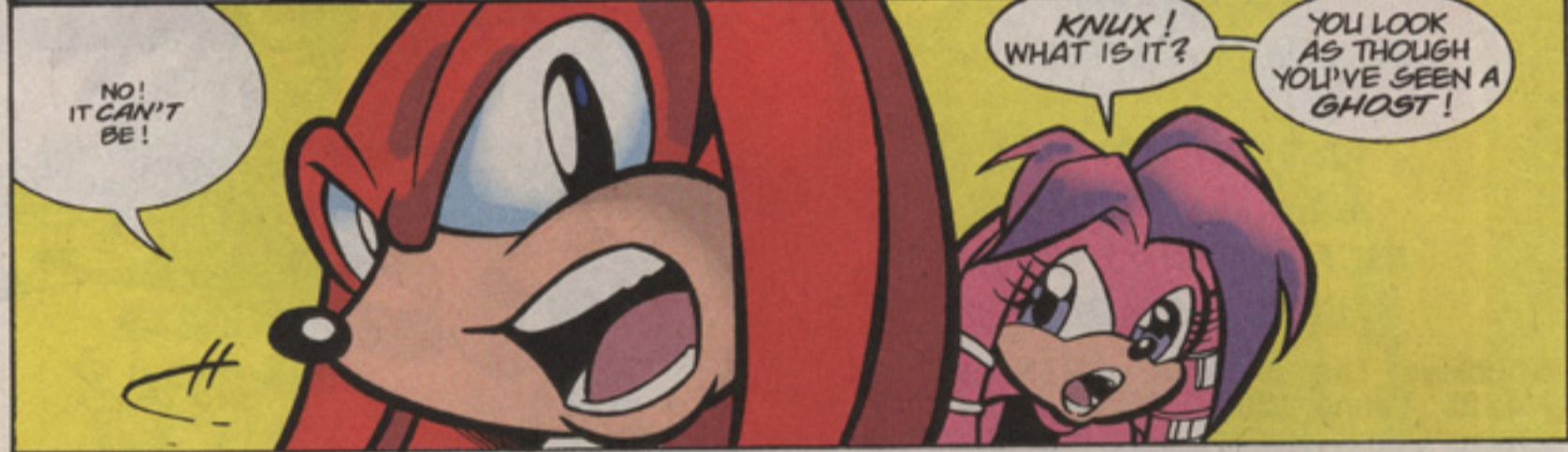
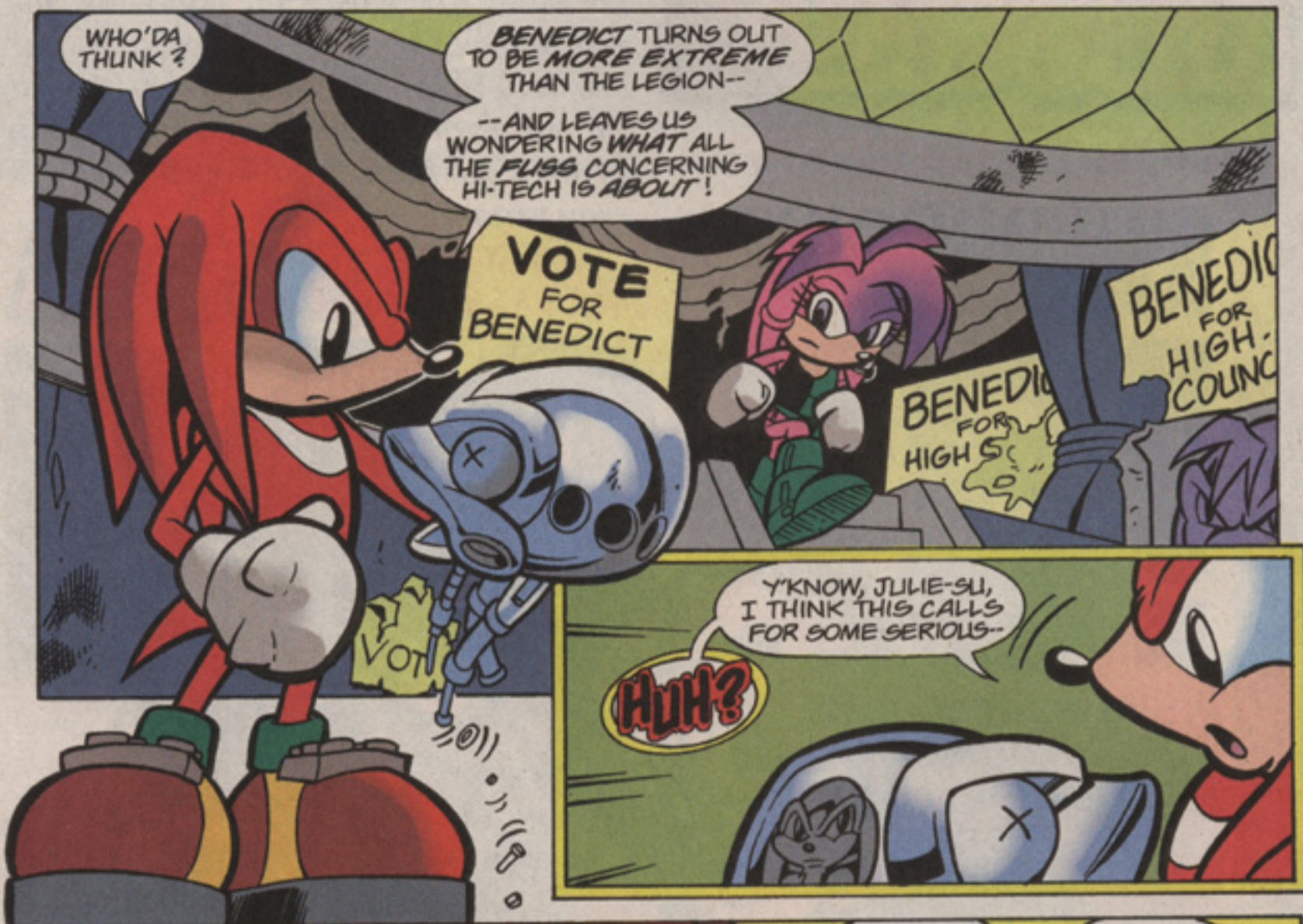
*ARCHIE COMICS AND SEGA PRESENT...
GNUCKLES THE ECHIDNA!*

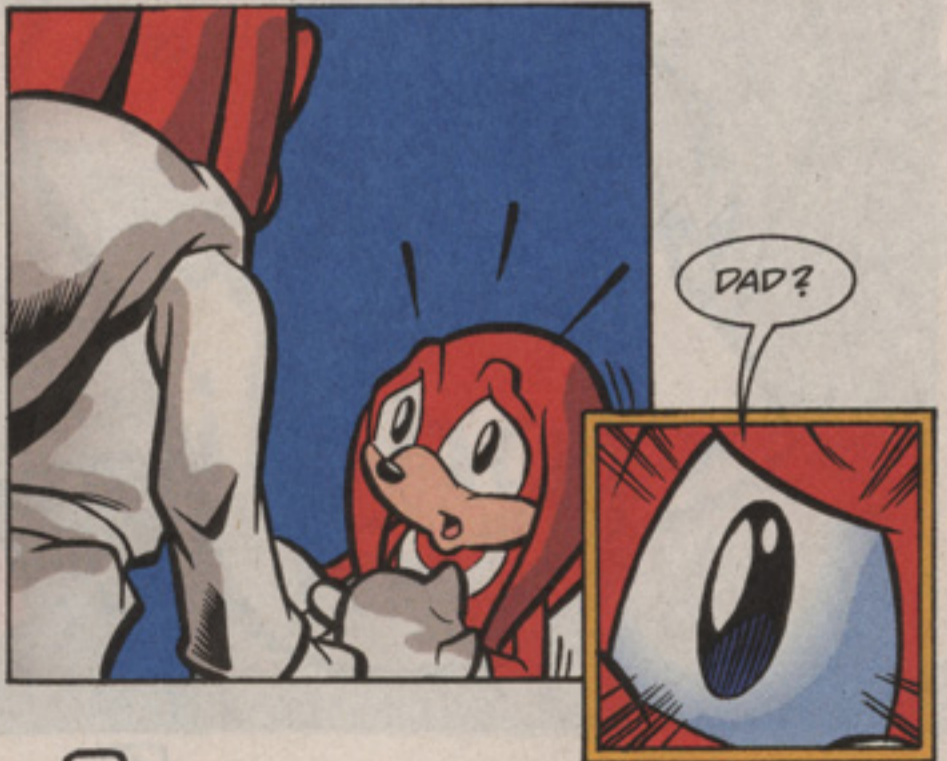
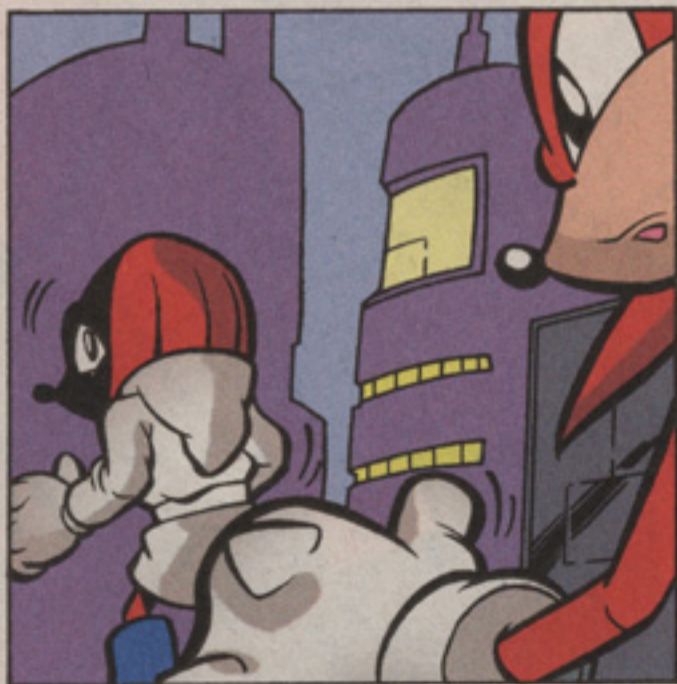
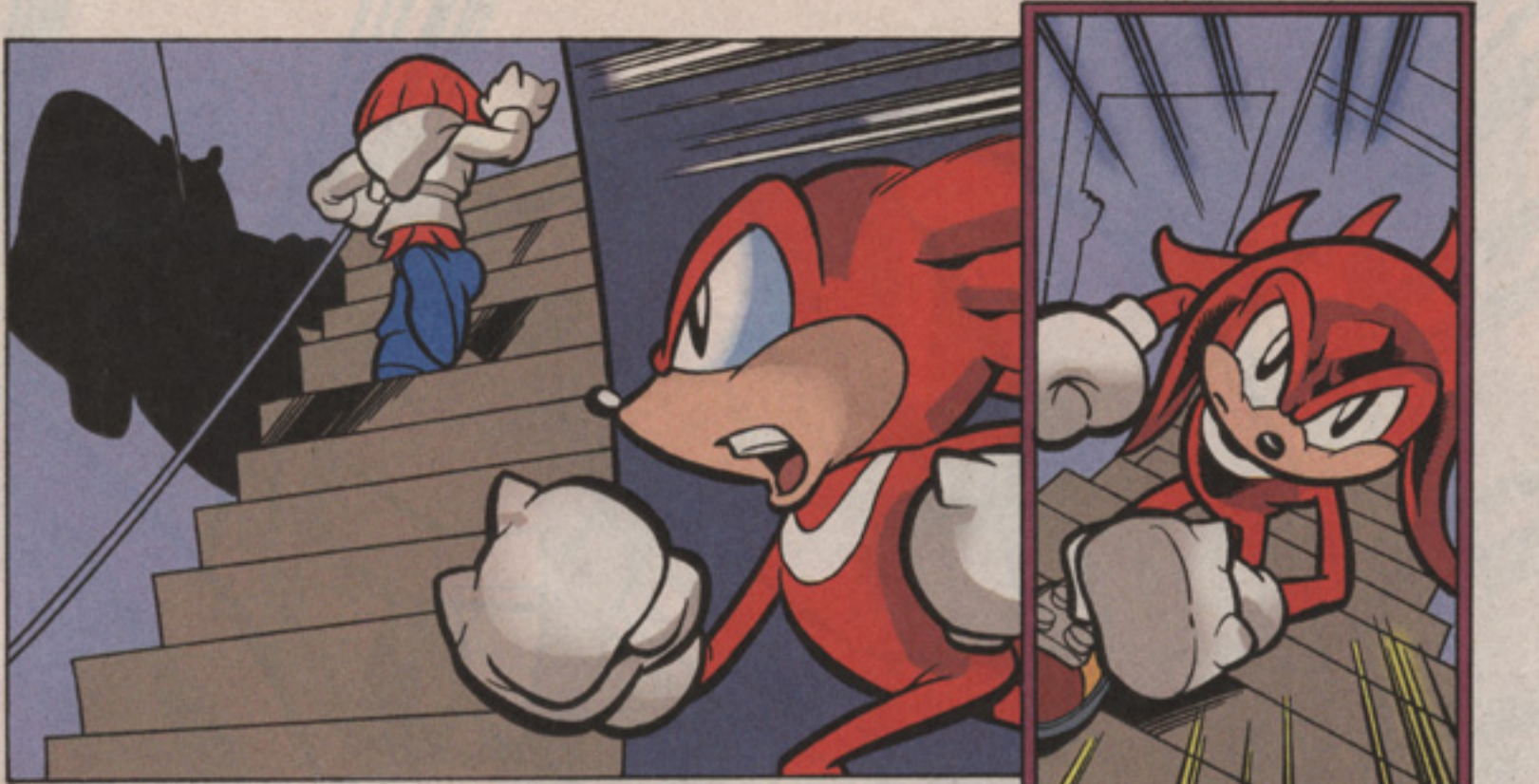


A LITTLE LESS THAN SIX YEARS AGO, GNUCKLES ACCOMPANIED HIS FATHER, LOCKE, TO THE EDGE OF THE FORBIDDEN ZONE, ONLY TO WITNESS HIS DISAPPEARANCE INTO A WALL OF UNEARTHLY FLAME.

FROM THAT POINT ON, GNUCKLES BELIEVED HIMSELF TO BE THE LAST OF HIS KIND... UNTIL RECENTLY.

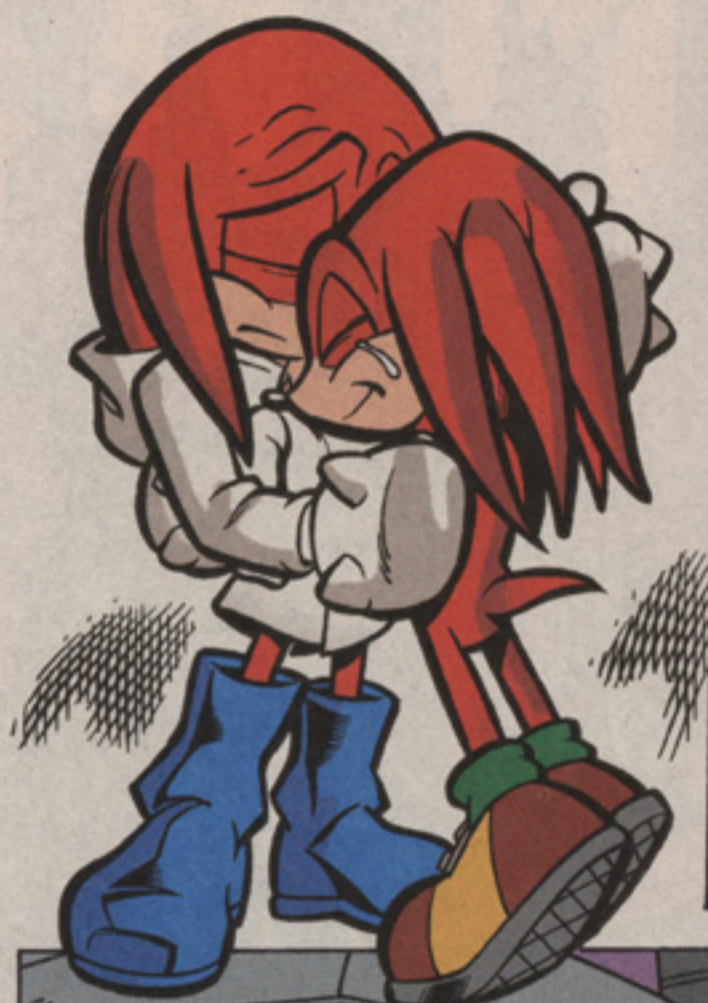
HAVING BEEN REUNITED WITH HIS PEOPLE, AMONG THEM HIS MOTHER, LARA-LE. THERE IS BUT ONE LAST LINK OF HIS PAST AWAITING TO BE RECLAIMED...

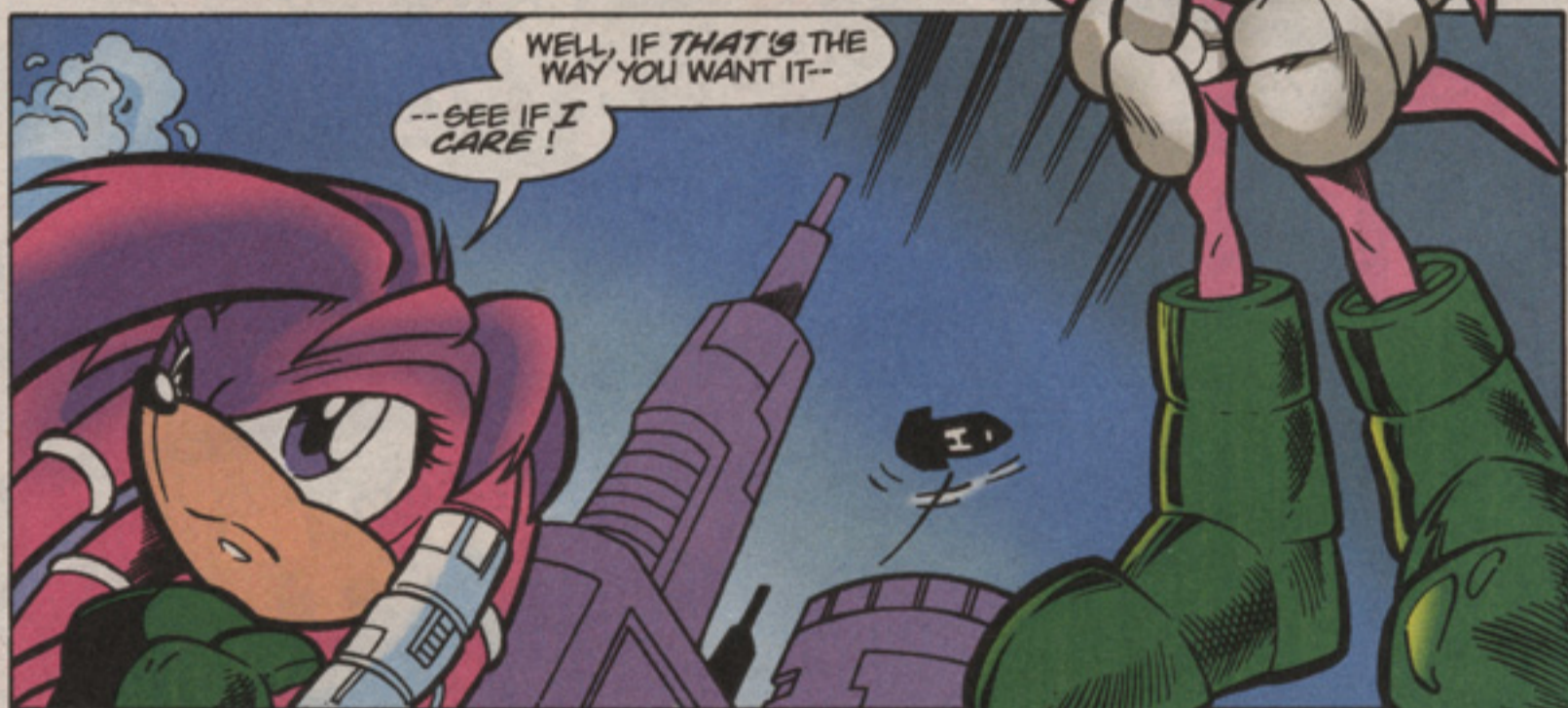
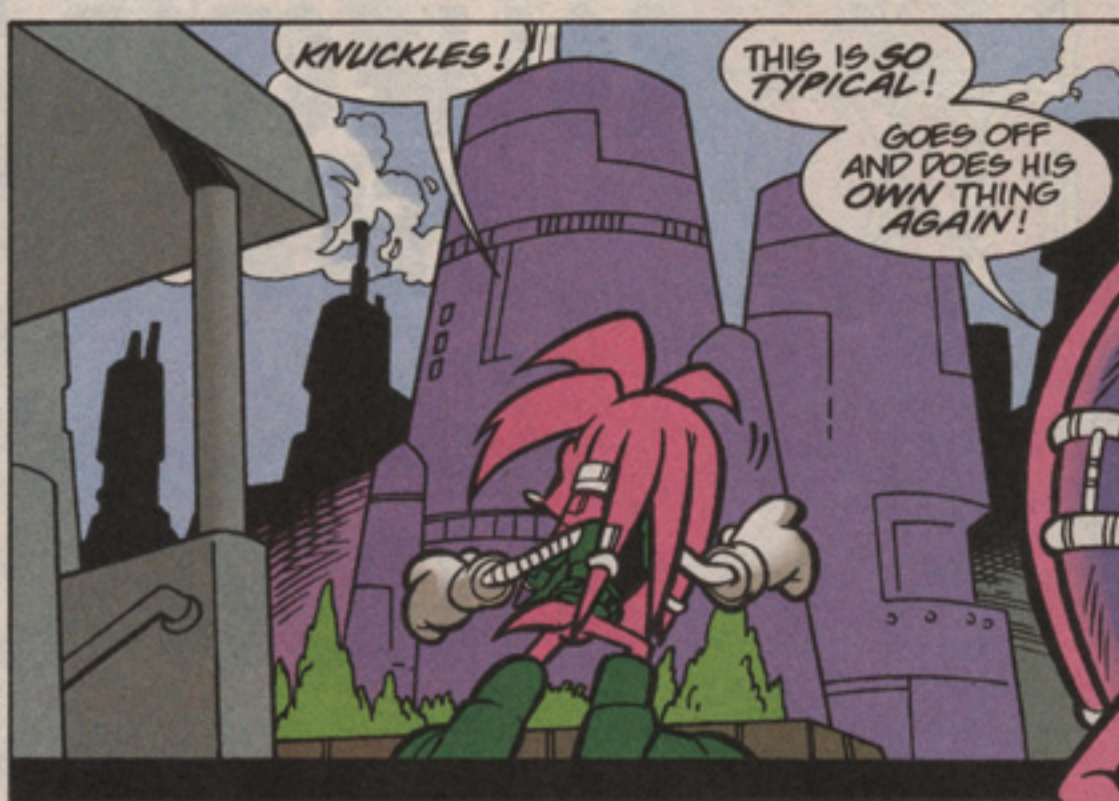




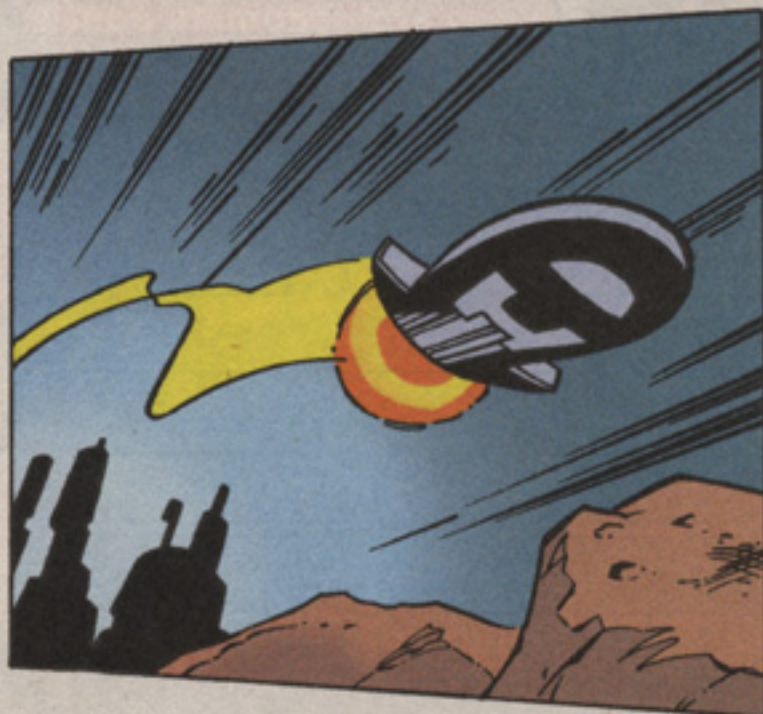








"JERK!"





--WE'RE HEADING TO HAVEN!



YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO EXPLAIN THAT ONE TO ME!

I STILL DON'T GET IT!

WHAT DO YOU WISH TO KNOW, SON?

EVERYTHING!

I DIDN'T GET FAR AFTER THE INTRODUCTIONS WERE MADE!*

* HE'S NOT KIDDING, EITHER. SEE KNUCKLES # 21 AND # 22 FOR DETAILS--JUSTIN



THERE'S SO MUCH TO TELL YOU, THAT I'M NOT CERTAIN WHERE TO BEGIN, EITHER!

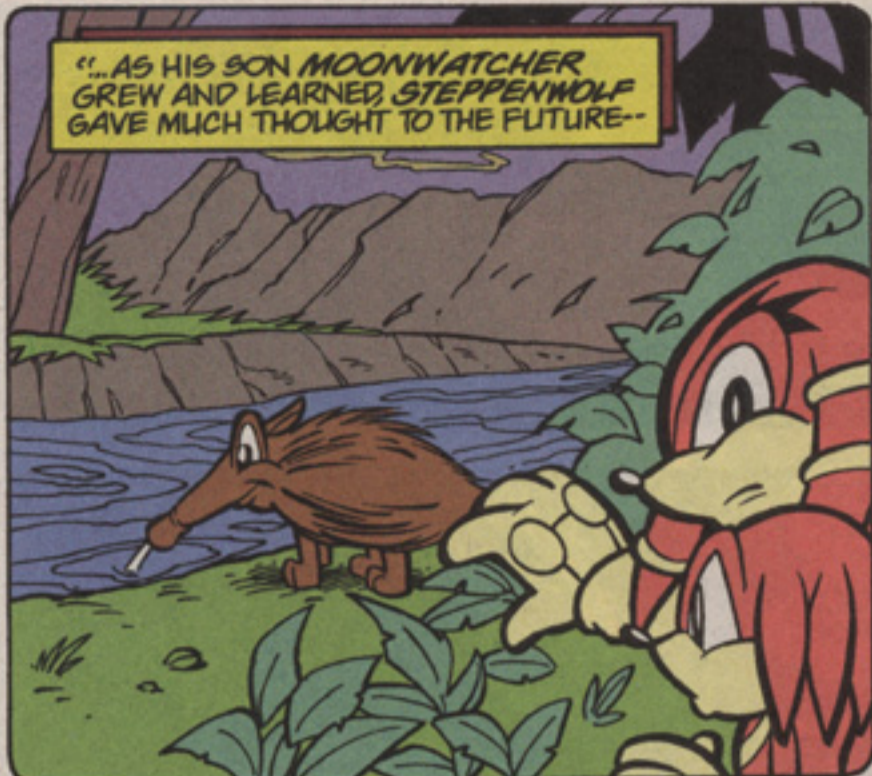
EXPLAIN HAVEN, EH?



HAVEN WAS DESIGNED AND BUILT BY THE FIRE-ANTS AS A FACILITY FOR YOUR ANCESTOR STEPPENWOLF TO CARRY OUT HIS DUTIES AS GUARDIAN OF THE FLOATING ISLAND.

"OVER TIME, AND UNDER STEPPENWOLF'S GUIDANCE, IT WOULD BECOME SOMETHING MORE --MUCH MORE..."

"...AS HIS SON MOONWATCHER GREW AND LEARNED, STEPPENWOLF GAVE MUCH THOUGHT TO THE FUTURE--"



"--PLANNING FOR THE DAY WHEN HIS OWN OFFSPRING WOULD ASSUME THEIR DUTIES ALONGSIDE HIM..."



SO THEN ONE DAY IT HITS HIM-- BANG!--

--I'VE GOT TO START A SECRET SOCIETY, RIGHT?



HARDLY!

OVER TIME, IT BECAME QUITE EVIDENT THAT IF THE CHAOS EMERALD WERE TO BE PRESERVED, STEPPENWOLF WOULD ALSO HAVE TO BE VIGILANT OF THE WORLD BEYOND!



"WHEN THE FLOATING ISLAND WAS VISITED FOR THE FIRST TIME BY OVERLANDERS, STEPPENWOLF COULD SENSE THERE WAS MORE BEHIND THEIR WORDS..."

I AM KNOWN AS BRUTUS KINTOBOR OF THE HOUSE OF IVO.

MY COMPANIONS AND I COME IN PEACE!



GET READY TO SHOOT TO KILL!

"WHILE STEPPENWOLF WAS ALWAYS ONE TO GREET WITH OPEN ARMS--"



"--HE WAS CERTAINLY *NOBODY'S FOOL*, VERY MUCH IN *COMMAND* OF ANY GIVEN SITUATION, AND THUS *PREPARED* FOR ANY POSSIBLE *TREACHERY*..."

OH, THE PAIN!
THE PAIN!!

MY BRAIN!!

IT FEELS LIKE IT'S ON FIRE!!!

STOP IT!

MAKE IT STOP!!!

HAVE MERCY!!

ON ONE CONDITION!

ANYTHING! NAME YOUR TERMS!!!

I'LL MAKE YOUR PAIN STOP, AS LONG AS YOUR KIND PROMISES *NEVER* TO STEP FOOT ON THE FLOATING ISLAND *EVER AGAIN*!

YOU *BREAK* YOUR OATH, AND I PROMISE YOU AND YOURS WILL *RUE* THE DAY THEY WERE BORN!

WE--AGREE!

BUT BEFORE WE DEPART, THERE'S ONE THING I WISH TO KNOW--

--HOW DID YOU LEARN OF OUR INTENTIONS?

THAT'S MY SECRET!

WHO KNOWS WHAT *ELSE* YOUR KIND WILL TRY NEXT?

NOW--
GO!

"SO WHAT DID GIVE THE OVERLANDERS AWAY?"



STEPPENWOLF HAD AN ALLY EVEN FEW ECHIDNAS KNEW ABOUT--

--THE FIRE-ANTS!

THE FIRE-ANTS?!! WHAT COULD THEY DO?

"ON THEIR OWN, SHORT OF DEFENDING THEMSELVES, NOT MUCH, BUT AS A COLLECTIVE--"

"--WITH THEIR NATURAL TELEPATHIC ABILITIES GREATLY ENHANCED WHEN UTILIZED IN CHORUS, A GREAT DEAL MORE..."

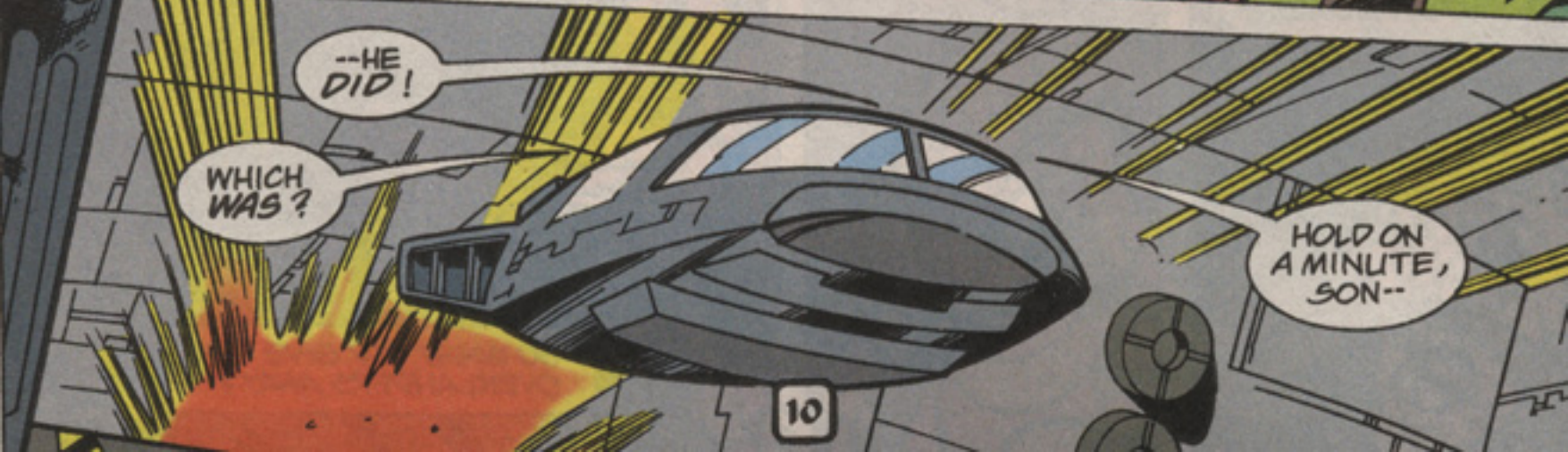


"AFTER THE OVERLANDERS HAD GONE, CHRISTOPHELES SPOKE WITH STEPPENWOLF..."

THEY MAY HAVE BEEN THE FIRST--
-- BUT THEY WOY'NT BE THE LAST TO INVADE THIS ISLAND!

I AGREE!
HAVE YOU ANY SUGGESTIONS, OLD FRIEND?

AS A MATTER OF FACT--



--HE DID!

WHICH WAS?

HOLD ON A MINUTE, SON--





--CHRISTOPHELES AND STEPPENWOLF DECIDED MORE THAN ONE GUARDIAN WOULD BE NECESSARY IN ORDER TO PROTECT THE FLOATING ISLAND AND ALL ITS INHABITANTS!

IT WAS THEN THAT STEPPENWOLF BROUGHT HIS SON, MOONWATCHER, TO HAVEN...

FATHER, WHAT IS THIS PLACE?



THIS IS WHERE YOU AND I WILL CONDUCT OPERATIONS FROM AS WE CARRY ON THE RESPONSIBILITIES ENTRUSTED TO US!



YOU HAVE WORKED HARD AND LEARNED WELL--AND I AM PROUD OF YOU, MOONWATCHER!

PROUD TO HAVE YOU AT MY SIDE!

AND NOW TO THE TASK AT HAND--



--AS WE FACE DANGERS FROM BEYOND AS WELL AS WITHIN!

IS THIS HOW IT WAS WITH YOU AND YOUR FATHER?

YOUR GRANDFATHER EDMUND NEVER COMPREHENDED THE CHALLENGES AHEAD--

--WHICH IS WHY I'M OFF TO RECONNOITER THE LAND MASS WE'RE ABOUT TO PASS OVER!

WHILE I ASCERTAIN THE LEVEL OF POTENTIAL JEOPARDY--





-IT WILL FALL ONTO YOU TO *ENSURE* THE *SECURITY* OF THE EMERALD, THIS ISLAND AND ALL WHO DWELL UPON IT!

I WILL NOT LET YOU DOWN, FATHER!



FOR A WHILE, STEPPENWOLF AND MOONWATCHER WOULD TRADE-OFF DUTIES--

--ALLOWING MOONWATCHER TO INTERACT WITH THE INHABITANTS OF MOBIUS PRIME AS WELL!

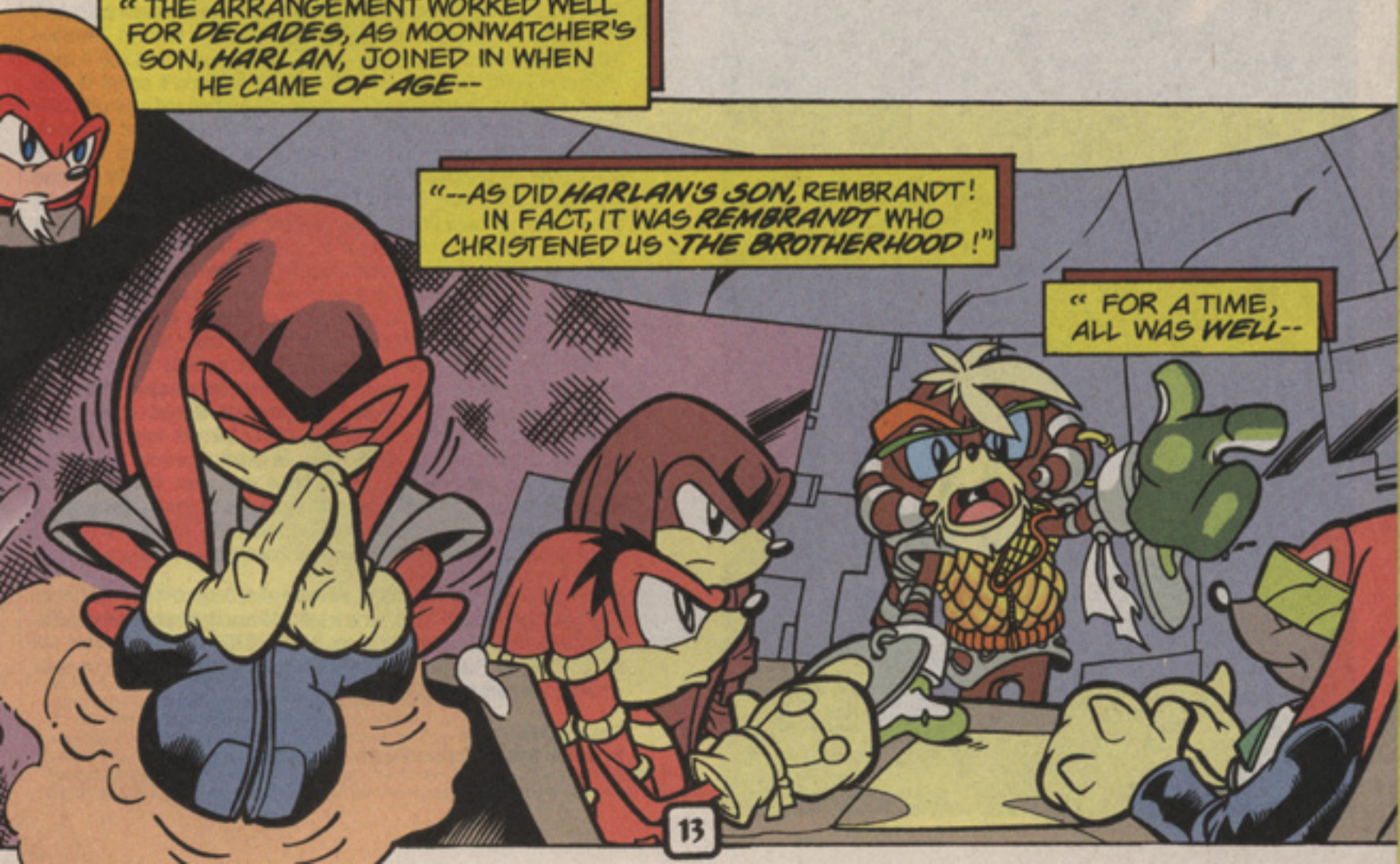
HOW COME YOU NEVER DID THAT WITH ME, DAD?

I'M GETTING TO THAT, SON!

"THE ARRANGEMENT WORKED WELL FOR DECADES, AS MOONWATCHER'S SON, HARLAN, JOINED IN WHEN HE CAME OF AGE--

"--AS DID HARLAN'S SON, REMBRANDT! IN FACT, IT WAS REMBRANDT WHO CHRISTENED US 'THE BROTHERHOOD'!"

"FOR A TIME, ALL WAS WELL--





"--UNTIL REMBRANDT'S SON AARON, ON HIS THIRD TIME UPON MOBIUS PRIME, ENCOUNTERED A SQUADRON OF OVERLANDERS WANDERING THROUGH A FOREST..."



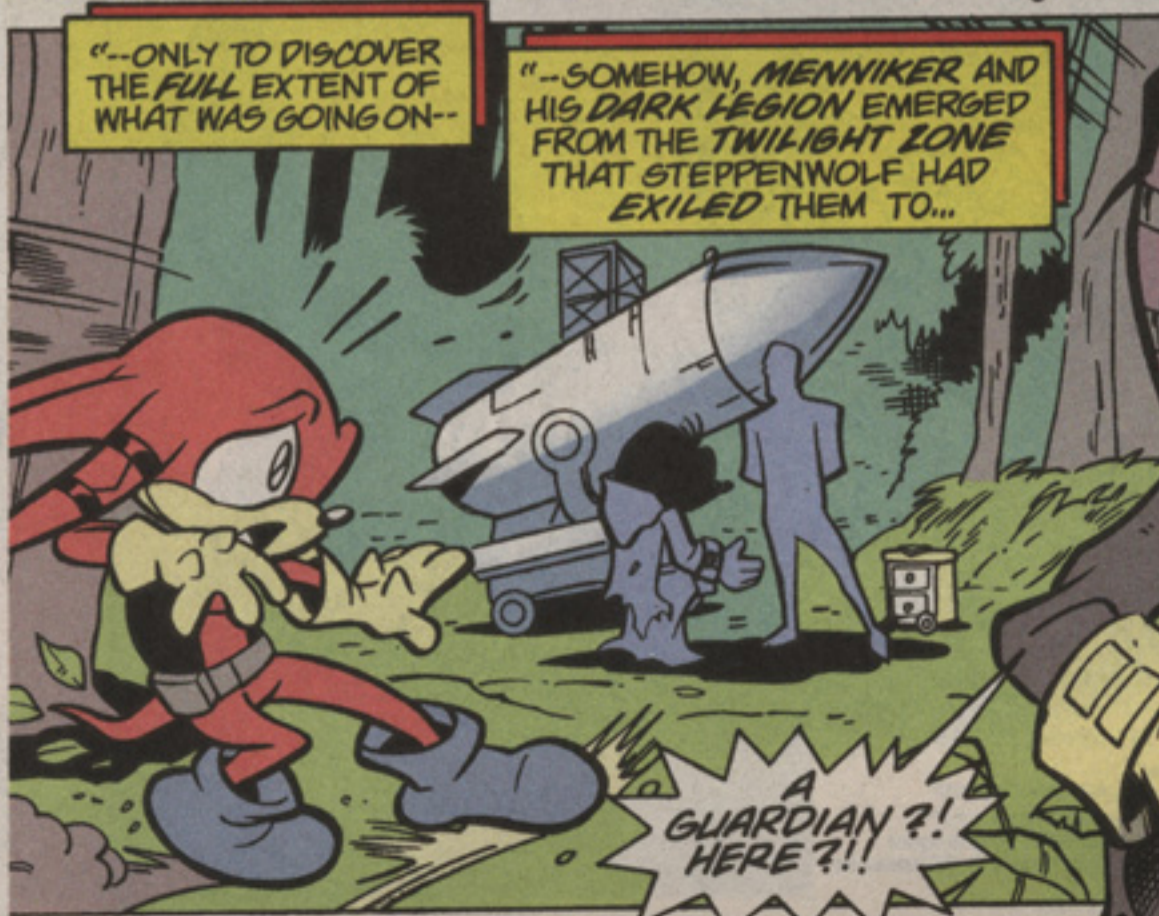
ONE OF YOURS?



HARDLY!



"STILL YOUNG AND RELATIVELY INEXPERIENCED, AARON WISELY RAN FOR HIS LIFE--"

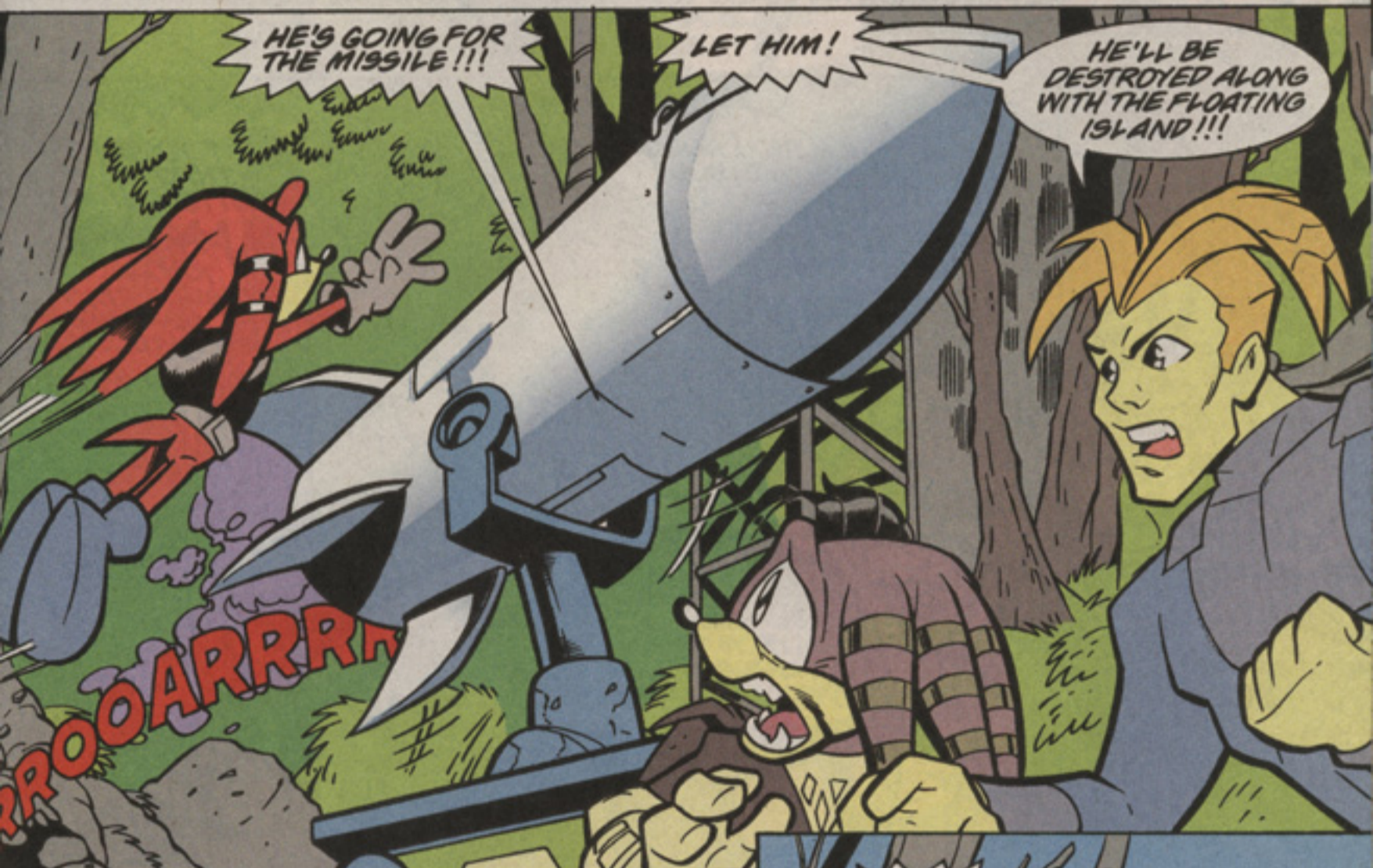


"--ONLY TO DISCOVER THE FULL EXTENT OF WHAT WAS GOING ON--"

"--SOMEHOW, MENNIKER AND HIS DARK LEGION EMERGED FROM THE TWILIGHT ZONE THAT STEPPENWOLF HAD EXILED THEM TO..."

A GUARDIAN?! HERE?!!





THIS IS EXACTLY LIKE THE SYSTEMS GRANDFATHER HAD SHOWN ME!

NOW IF I CROSS-CIRCUIT TO 'B', I SHOULD BE ABLE TO--

WHOOOPS!

GET OFF OF THERE!!!

YOU MAKE ME, BLUB!

I'VE GOT-- MORE IMPORTANT-- THINGS-- TO DO!

DON'T TOUCH THAT SWITCH!!!

YOU'LL PREMATURELY SET OFF THE DETONATOR!!

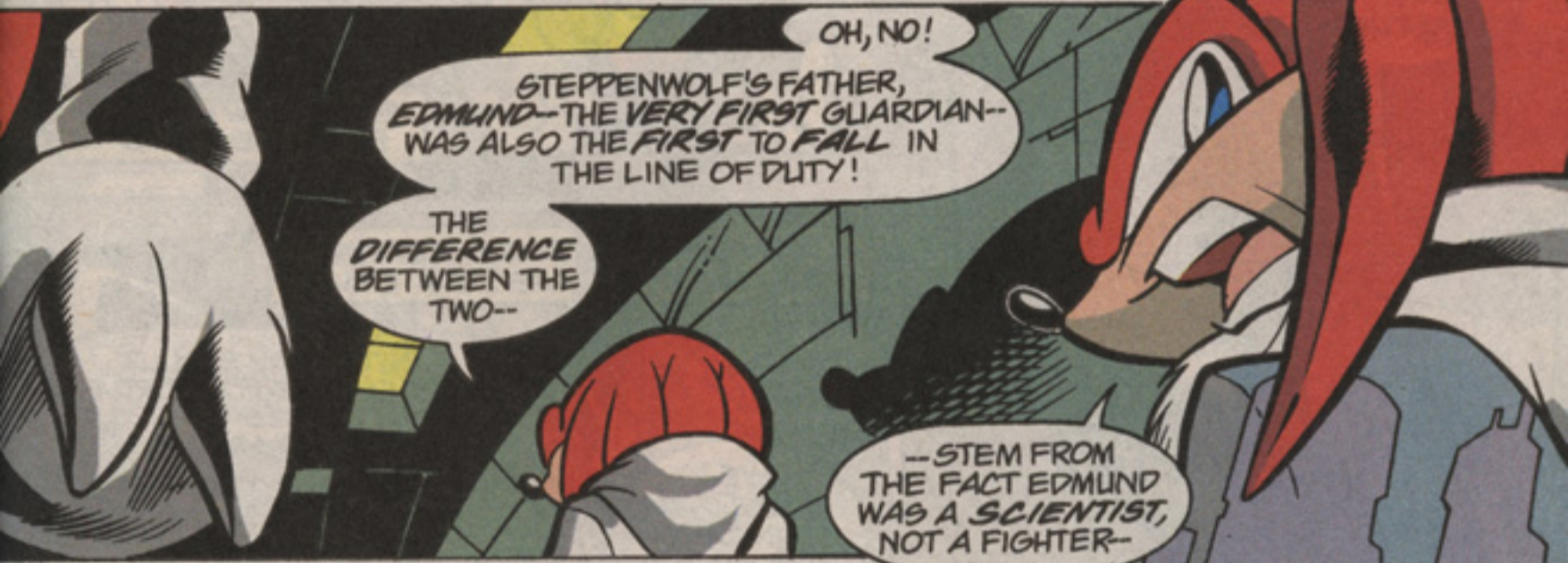
REALLY?!

THANKS FOR TELLING ME!!!



THEY NEVER DID FIND ANY TRACE OF AARON OR MENNIKER!

SO HE WAS THE FIRST GUARDIAN TO DIE!



OH, NO!

STEPPENWOLF'S FATHER, EDMUND--THE VERY FIRST GUARDIAN-- WAS ALSO THE FIRST TO FALL IN THE LINE OF DUTY!

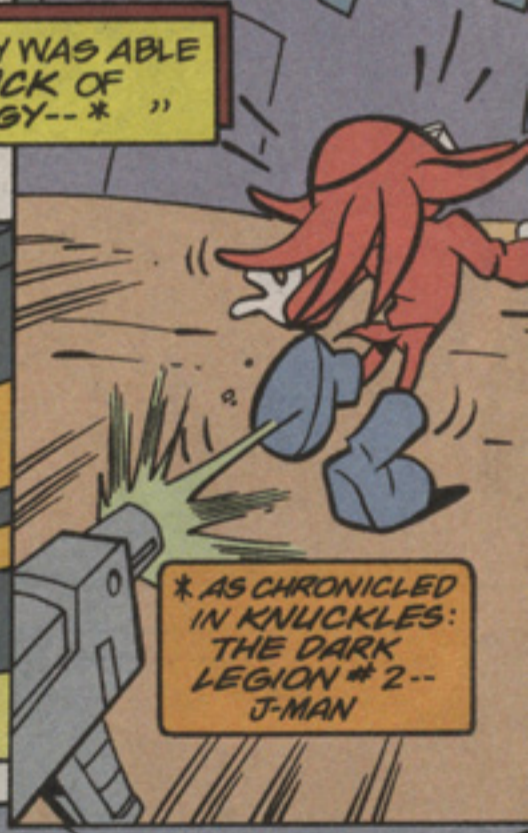
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO--

--STEM FROM THE FACT EDMUND WAS A SCIENTIST, NOT A FIGHTER--

" --THUS, THE ENEMY WAS ABLE TO EXPLOIT HIS LACK OF COMBAT STRATEGY-- * "



--WHEREAS AARON, THOUGH GIFTED WITH EXTRAORDINARY INTELLIGENCE, SUCCUMBED TO THE BRAVADO AND RECKLESSNESS OF HIS YOUTH!



* AS CHRONICLED IN KNUCKLES: THE DARK LEGION # 2-- J-MAN

" THOUGH REMBRANDT SUFFERED THE MOST, THE OTHER GUARDIANS WERE JUST AS AGGRIEVED --

" -- AND DETERMINED TO TAKE STEPS TO ENSURE THIS WOULDN'T HAPPEN AGAIN... "



"--ESPECIALLY WHEN AARON'S YOUNGER BROTHER, JORDAN, MADE IT KNOWN HE WANTED TO CARRY ON IN HIS BROTHER'S STEAD.."

FATHER--

--I WANT MORE THAN ANYTHING TO BECOME THE GUARDIAN THAT AARON CAN NEVER BE!

"REMBRANDT CHOKED BACK THE TEARS--

"--AND BEGAN TUTORING JORDAN IN A MANNER MUCH AS I DID YOU..."

THIS ISN'T RIGHT!

BETTER WE SHOULD ESTABLISH LIMITS FOR JORDAN AND INCREASE HIS RESPONSIBILITIES GRADUALLY!

WE SHOULD ALL BE INVOLVED IN JORDAN'S TRAINING!

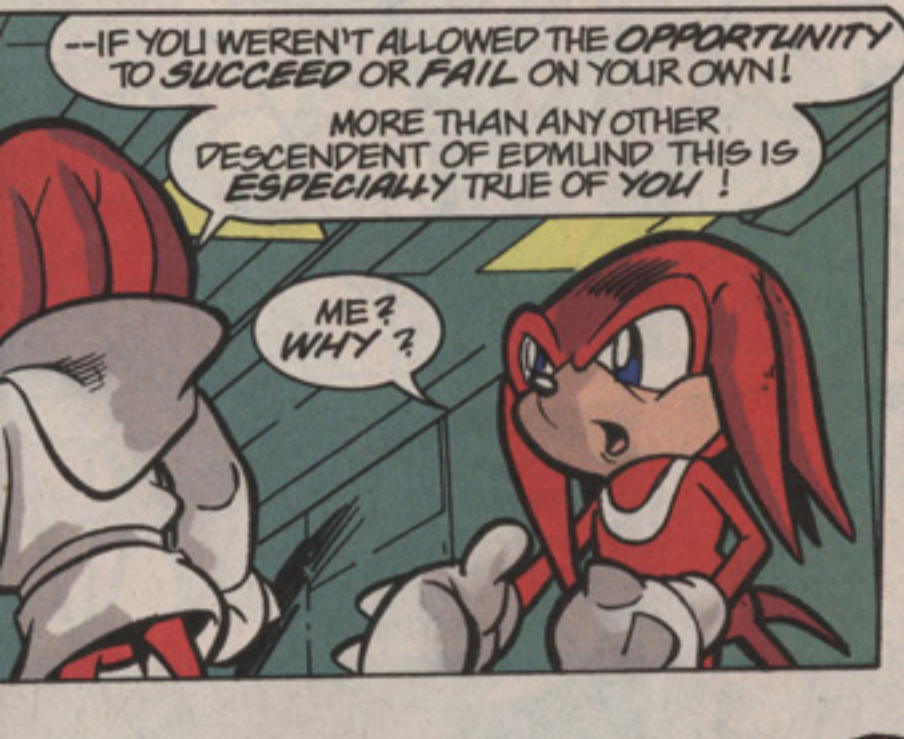
SO YOU DIDN'T JUST ABANDON ME?

HARDLY!

I WAS ALWAYS THERE FOR YOU, KNUCKLES--

--BUT IN ORDER FOR YOU TO LEARN SELF-RELIANCE, I HAD TO PROVIDE THE NECESSARY ENVIRONMENT!

YOU WOULDN'T BE THE INDIVIDUAL YOU ARE--



--IF YOU WEREN'T ALLOWED THE OPPORTUNITY TO SUCCEED OR FAIL ON YOUR OWN!

MORE THAN ANY OTHER DESCENDENT OF EDMLIND THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE OF YOU!

ME? WHY?

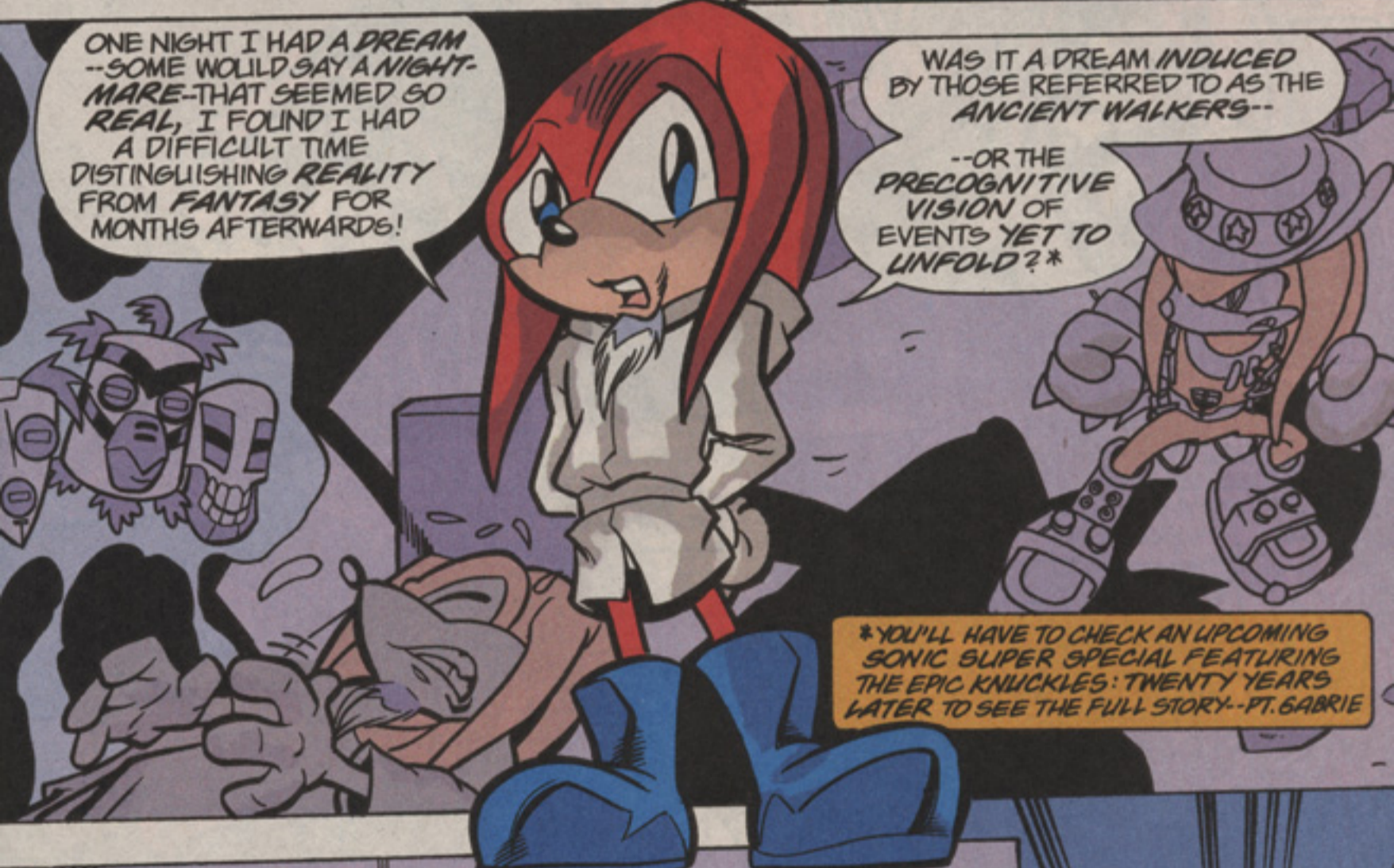


ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE READY FOR THIS?

ABSOLUTELY, FATHER!

YOU HAVE MY UNDIVIDED ATTENTION!

OKAAAYYY...

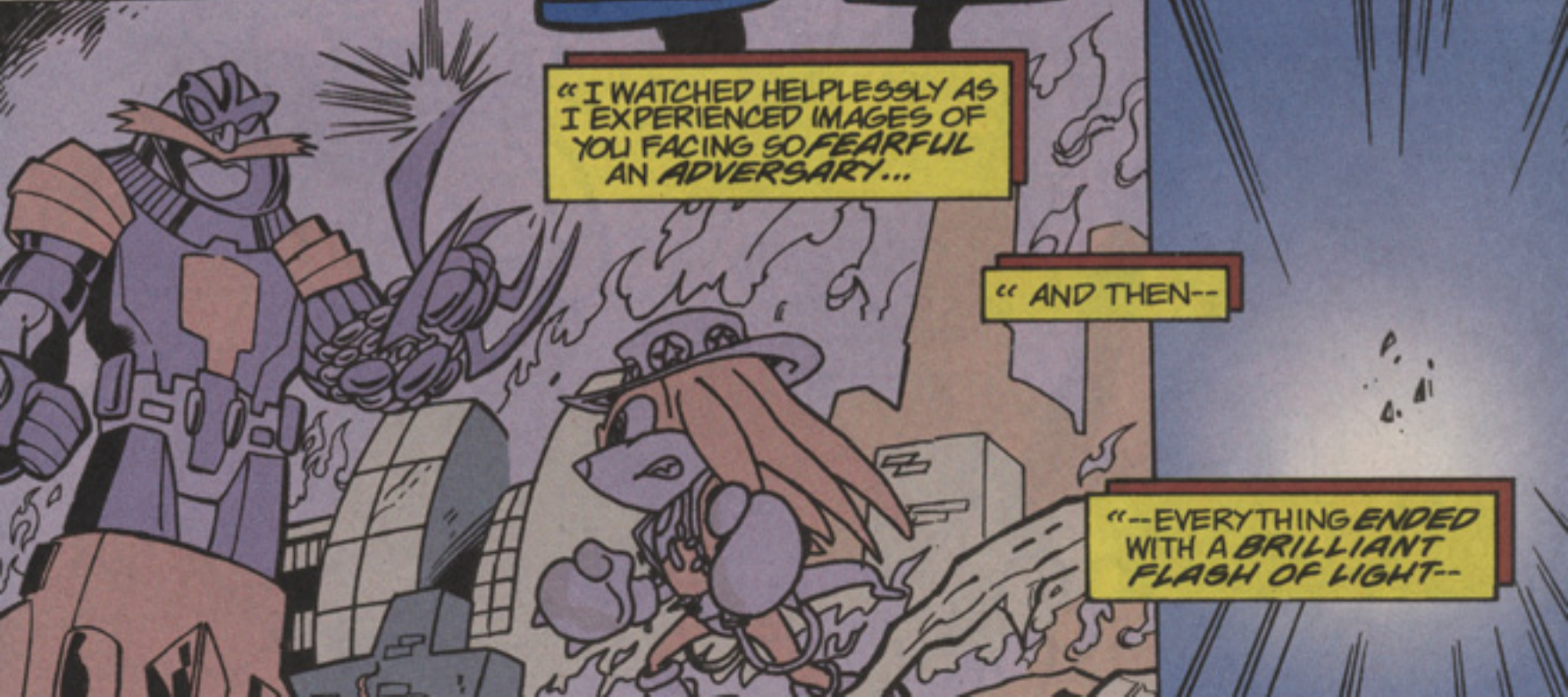


ONE NIGHT I HAD A DREAM --SOME WOULD SAY A NIGHTMARE-- THAT SEEMED SO REAL, I FOUND I HAD A DIFFICULT TIME DISTINGUISHING REALITY FROM FANTASY FOR MONTHS AFTERWARDS!

WAS IT A DREAM INDUCED BY THOSE REFERRED TO AS THE ANCIENT WALKERS--

--OR THE PRECOGNITIVE VISION OF EVENTS YET TO UNFOLD?*

*YOU'LL HAVE TO CHECK AN UPCOMING SONIC SUPER SPECIAL FEATURING THE EPIC KNUCKLES: TWENTY YEARS LATER TO SEE THE FULL STORY--PT. 6ABRIE



"I WATCHED HELPLESSLY AS I EXPERIENCED IMAGES OF YOU FACING SO FEARFUL AN ADVERSARY..."

"AND THEN--"

"--EVERYTHING ENDED WITH A BRILLIANT FLASH OF LIGHT--"

NOOOOOOO!

LOCKE?

WHAT IS IT,
HONEY?

ONLY A
DREAM,
LARA--

--YET
MORE THAN A
DREAM!

SO PERSISTENT
WERE THE VISIONS THAT
I SOUGHT OUT ADVICE
FROM A MOST UNLIKELY
SOURCE--

"--ATHAIR!"

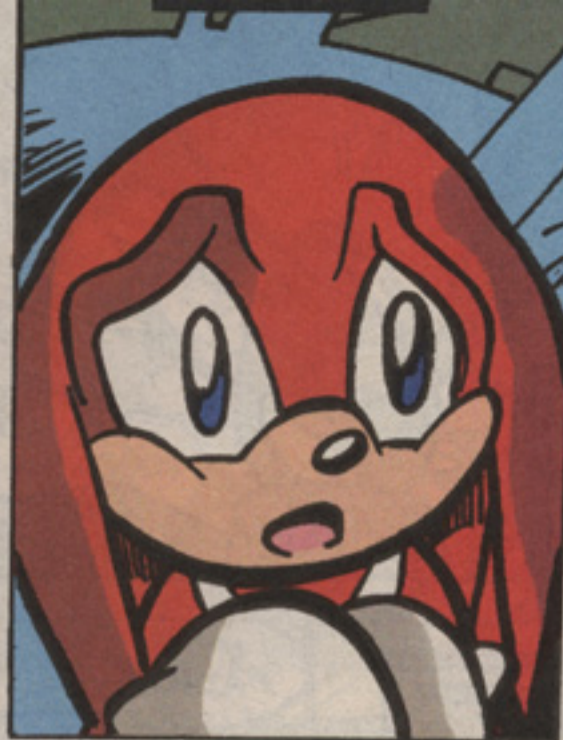
WHAT YOU
WITNESSED IS
THE FUTURE,
LOCKE--

--A FUTURE
THAT MAY YET
CONTAIN A SHRED
OF HOPE IF YOU
PREPARE FOR
IT!

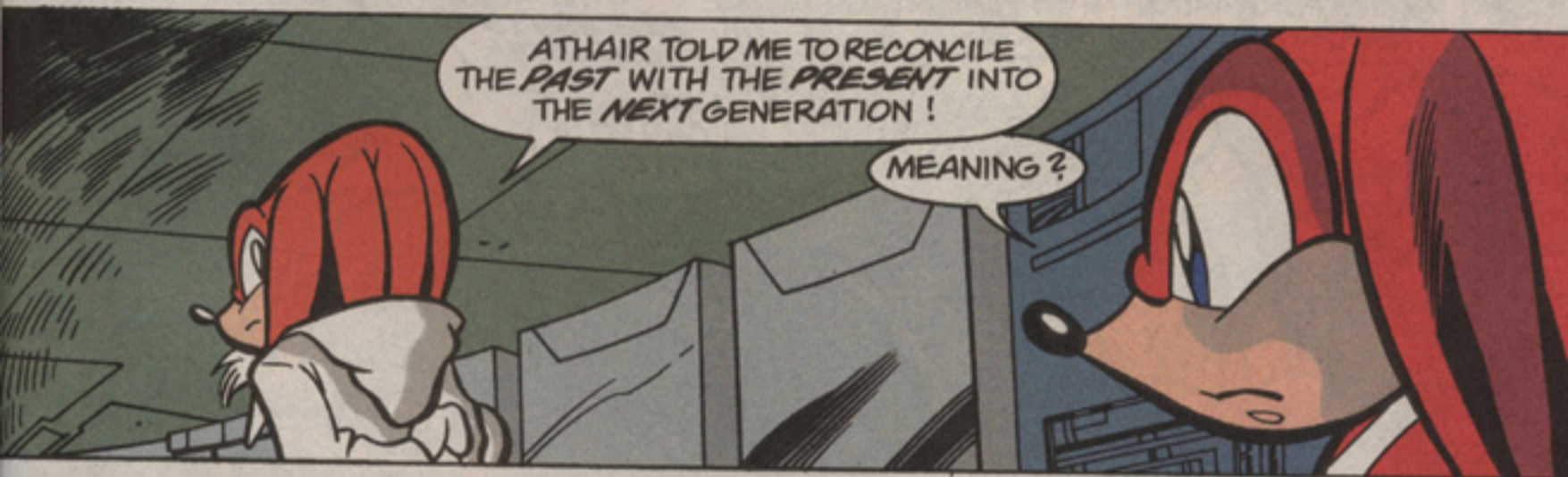
AND HOW
AM I TO GO
ABOUT MY TASK,
GRANDFATHER?



SO WHAT DID GRANDFATHER ATHAIR SAY?

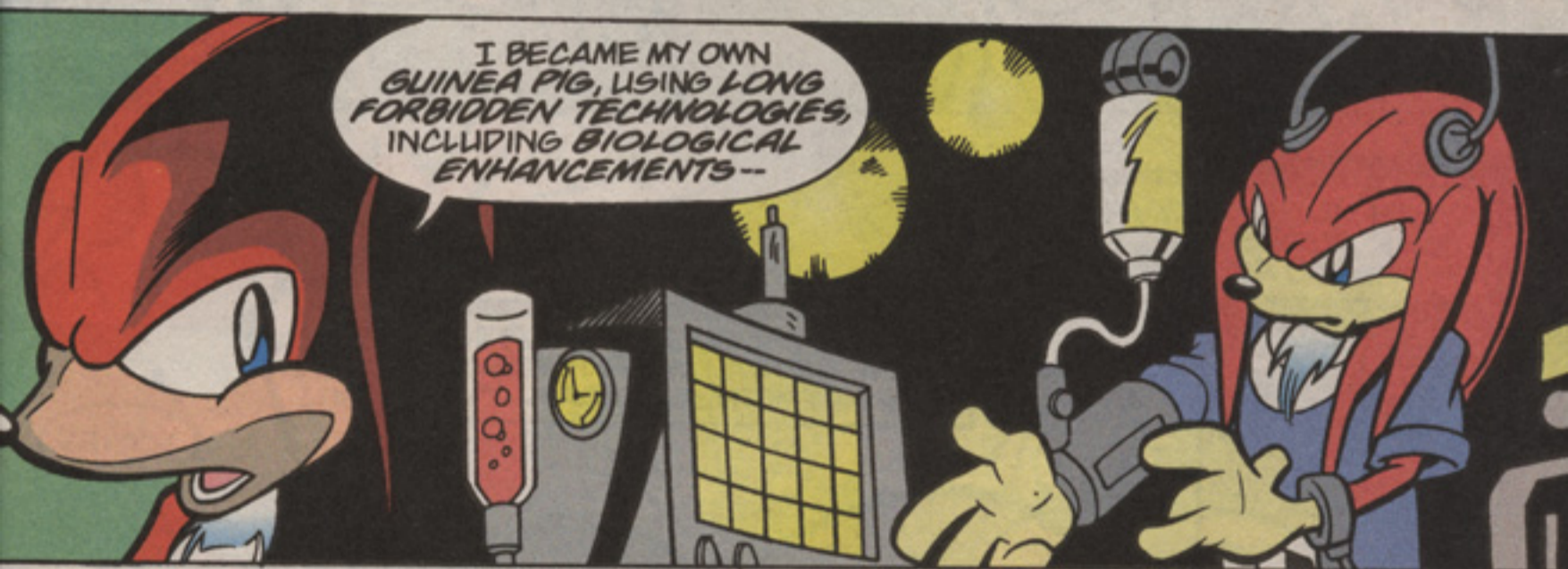


FATHER?



ATHAIR TOLD ME TO RECONCILE THE PAST WITH THE PRESENT INTO THE NEXT GENERATION!

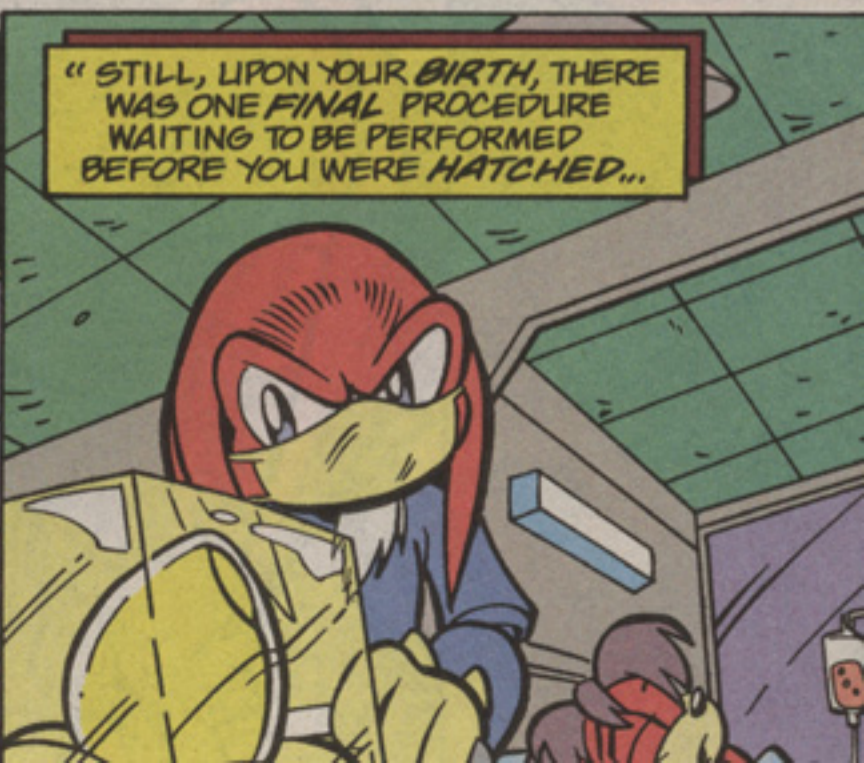
MEANING?



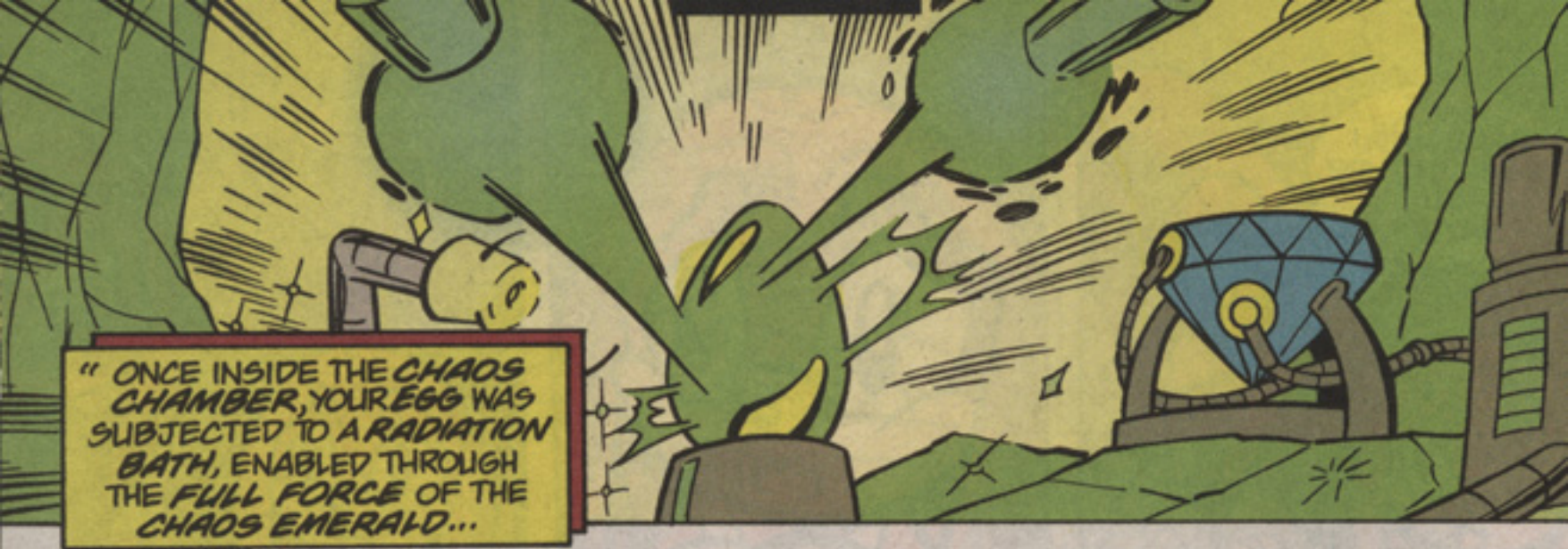
I BECAME MY OWN GUINEA PIG, USING LONG FORBIDDEN TECHNOLOGIES, INCLUDING BIOLOGICAL ENHANCEMENTS--



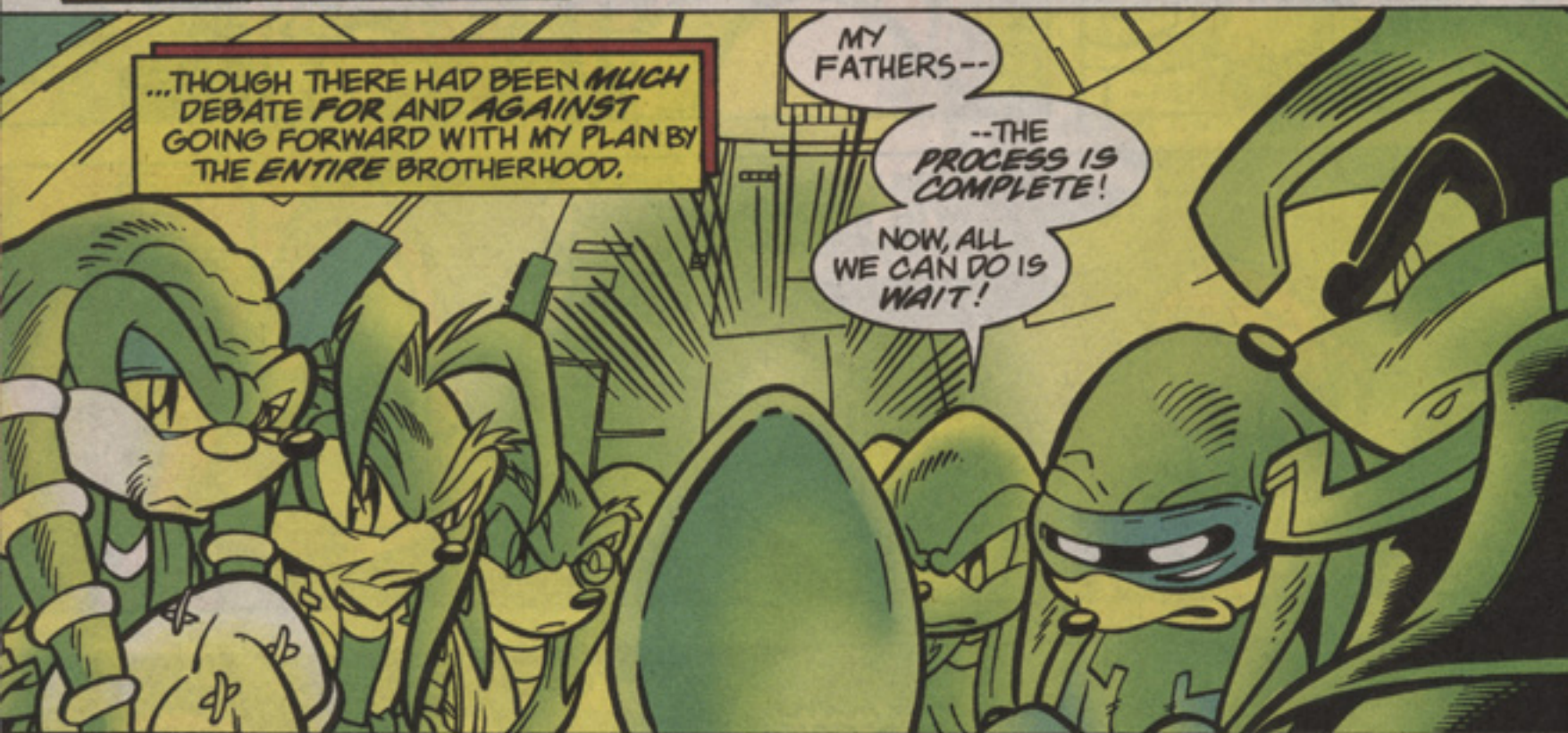
"-- SO THAT WHEN YOUR MOTHER CARRIED YOU, THE RESULT WAS MORE THAN JUST THE SUM TOTAL OF OUR COMBINED GENETIC STRUCTURE..."



" STILL, UPON YOUR BIRTH, THERE WAS ONE FINAL PROCEDURE WAITING TO BE PERFORMED BEFORE YOU WERE HATCHED..."



" ONCE INSIDE THE CHAOS CHAMBER, YOUR EGG WAS SUBJECTED TO A RADIATION BATH, ENABLED THROUGH THE FULL FORCE OF THE CHAOS EMERALD...




...THOUGH THERE HAD BEEN MUCH DEBATE FOR AND AGAINST GOING FORWARD WITH MY PLAN BY THE ENTIRE BROTHERHOOD,

MY FATHERS---

--THE PROCESS IS COMPLETE!

NOW, ALL WE CAN DO IS WAIT!



"WITH MUCH ANTICIPATION, YOUR MOTHER AND I WATCHED AS YOU HATCHED...

"...AND WHEN YOU EMERGED, I KNEW THEN ALL MY EFFORTS HAD MET WITH SUCCESS..."

LOCKE?

SO WHAT WAS IT THAT SAID EVERYTHING WAS A-OKAY?

SEE MY GLOVES?

YEAH? WHAT ABOUT 'EM?

OBSERVE!

EVEN THOUGH I'M A GUARDIAN, I'M ALSO STILL FULLY ECHIDNA!

YOU, ON THE OTHER HAND--

--ARE EVERY BIT THE GENETICALLY ENHANCED MUTANT OFFSPRING YOU WERE INTENDED TO BE!

IT'S TRUE!

ALL THIS TIME--

--I THOUGHT EVERY GUARDIAN HAD KNUCKLES LIKE MINE!

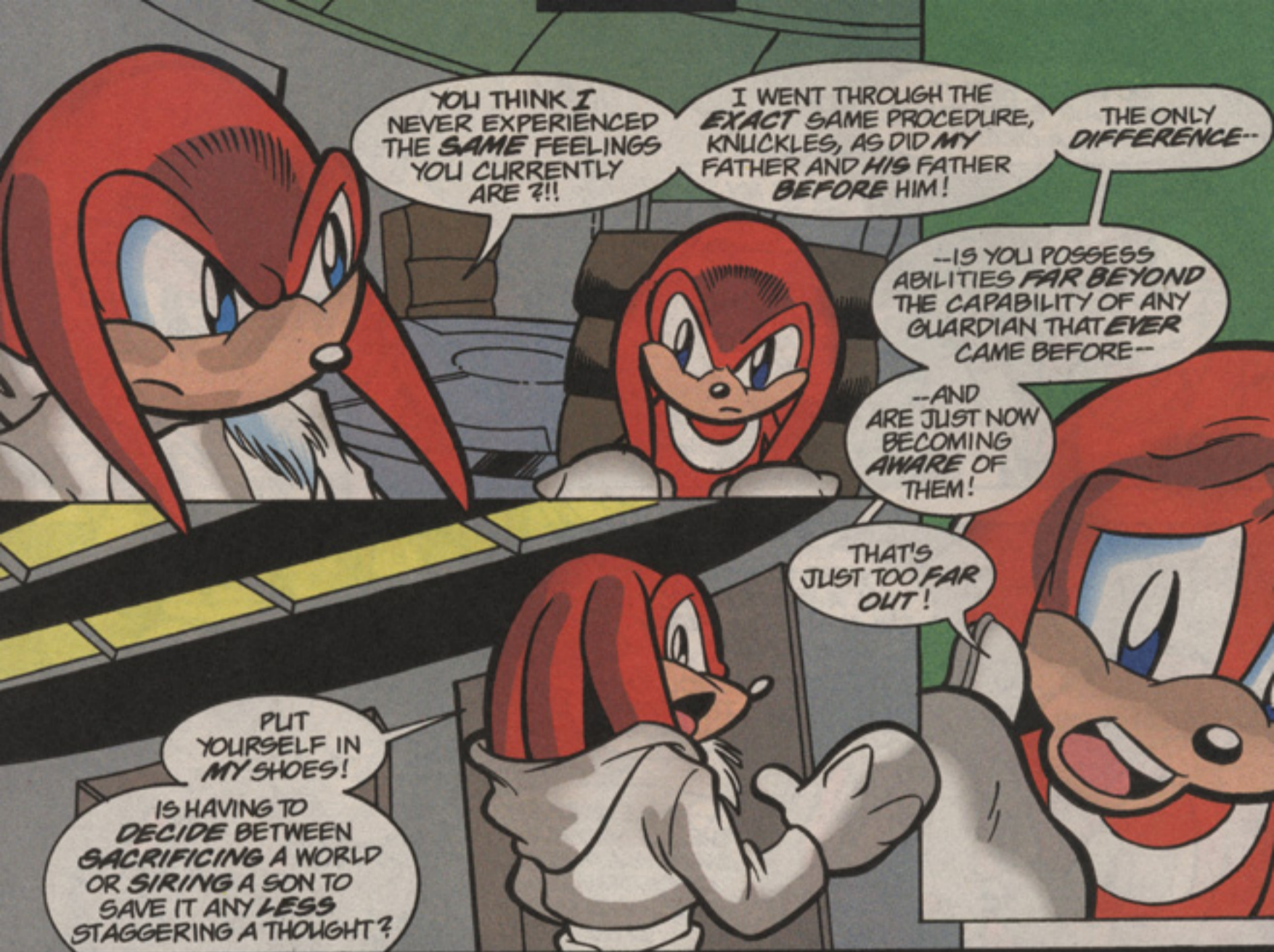
BUT, WHY **ME?!!**

THOUGH THE BROTHERHOOD CANNOT FIGHT THE FUTURE--

--YOU CAN CREATE ITS SAVIOR!

SAVIOR?!! ME?!!!

DID IT EVER OCCUR TO YOU I'D BE HAPPIER JUST BEING YOUR SON?!!



YOU THINK I NEVER EXPERIENCED THE **SAME FEELINGS** YOU CURRENTLY ARE ?!!

I WENT THROUGH THE **EXACT SAME PROCEDURE**, KNUCKLES, AS DID MY FATHER AND HIS FATHER **BEFORE HIM!**

THE ONLY **DIFFERENCE--**

--IS YOU POSSESS ABILITIES **FAR BEYOND** THE CAPABILITY OF ANY GUARDIAN THAT **EVER** CAME BEFORE--

--AND ARE JUST NOW BECOMING **AWARE** OF THEM!

THAT'S JUST TOO **FAR OUT!**

PUT YOURSELF IN **MY SHOES!**

IS HAVING TO **DECIDE** BETWEEN **SACRIFICING** A WORLD OR **SIRING** A SON TO SAVE IT ANY **LESS** STAGGERING A THOUGHT?



GOOD POINT!

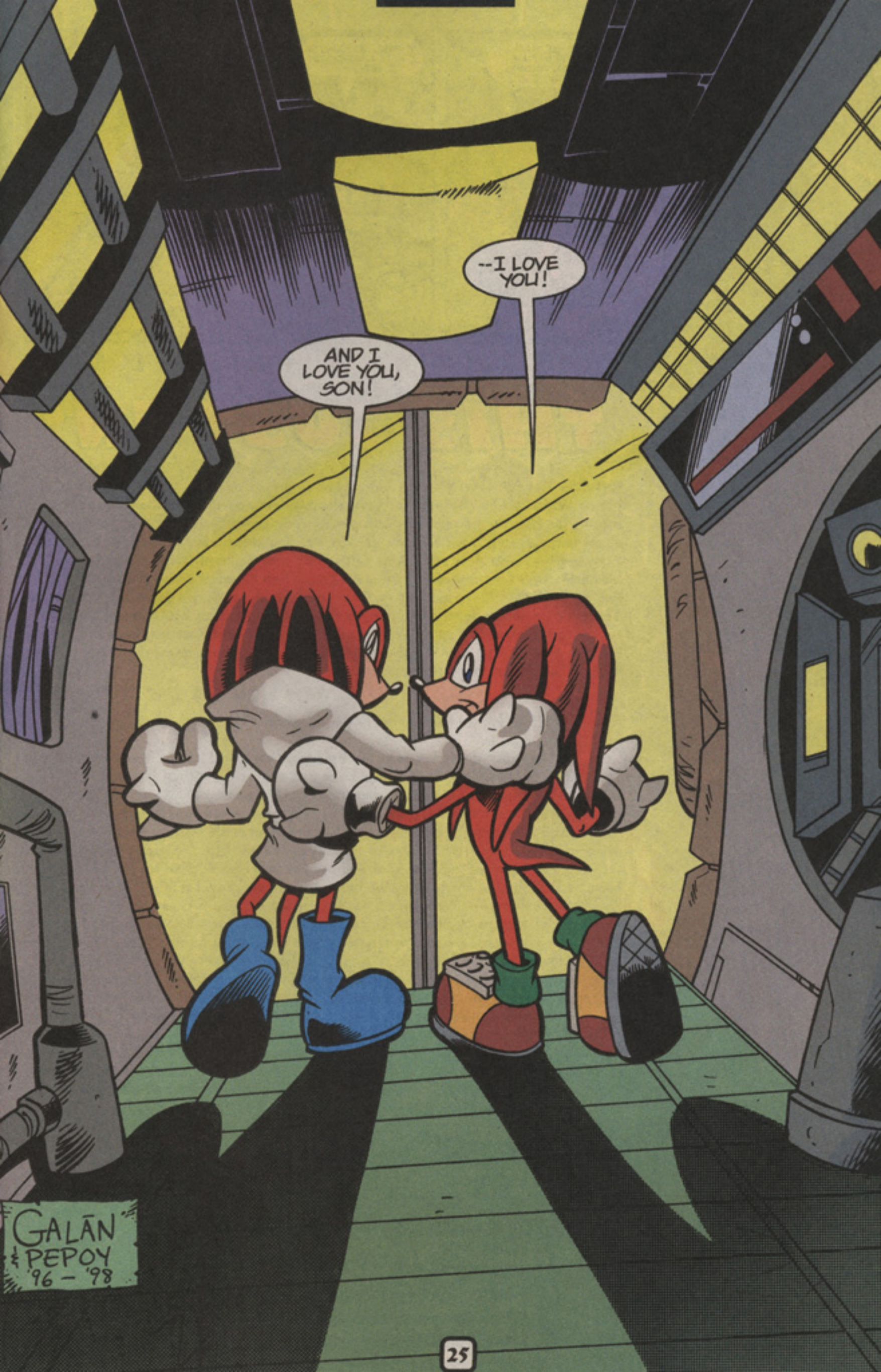
SO WHAT DO WE DO **NOW?**

NOW?

I THINK IT'S TIME WE TOOK A **BREAK** AND DID SOMETHING **TOGETHER--**

-- JUST LIKE ANY **FATHER** AND HIS **SON!**

DAD--



AND I LOVE YOU, SON!

--I LOVE YOU!

GALAN
PEPOY
'96 - '98



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Color in the figures
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